



# ENDURING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION VIA INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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## INTRODUCTION:

In the Constitution of India, Article 45 (a) has guaranteed Education as a Fundamental Right for each citizen. For this, the Government of India has been taking steps to equalize educational opportunities to its entire people since independence. In this process, efforts have been taken to overcome regional imbalances in the form of provisions for extra educational facilities to the under developed regions, socially, culturally and economically disadvantaged groups like OBC, SC and ST. To magnitude has made to set right the asymmetries in equalization of educational chances to all the citizens of India. Still there are areas where much work should be done to promote the concept of equalization of educational opportunities to air. In this respect, it is apt to think of the concept inclusive education to the excluded groups such as children in school education and students in higher education with different disabilities. In our educational system either at school or college level, one can find students with physical disabilities such as visual, hearing, motor handicap and intellectually abled/disabled (i.e., gifted or talented, mild and moderate intellectually handicapped apart from students with slow learning), students with specific learning difficulties and behaviour disorders. These are the students who experience difficulties in learning, socialization and maintaining interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships with their teachers, parents, peers and community.

The existing educational system must accommodate such students' needs, abilities and accordingly the physical, psychological and learning environments should be modified for the healthy development of these individuals. In other sense, providing facilitative barrier free environment i.e., better access to physical facilities for these students, providing facilitative teaching learning environment keeping in mind their disabilities, supportive systems for effective integration of these students with normal population, making suitable changes in examination and evaluation systems are the need of the hour for better inclusive education, either at school or college level.

## TERMINOLOGIES IN SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION :

It is better to clarify certain terminologies such as Special Education, Integrated Education, Mainstreaming and Inclusive Education that are used across the globe in different contexts. Special education is a specially designed supportive physical and learning system that are used within and outside the school and college for the student with physical and mental deficiencies that hamper their movement and learning. In other sense, these children need specially designed equipments and modified teaching learning environment to compensate their disability and teach (Reddy et al., 2000). Integrated education is the term, which refers to integration of special needs students in general education classrooms where they receive education on par with others. But extra efforts are taken to compensate their disability through supportive resource centres within the school/college. Likewise, Mainstreaming refers to providing instructions to special children in general education setting on the other hand; inclusive education is a more comprehensive term. It is concerned with reducing all exclusionary pressures such as disability, ability, specific learning difficulty race, gender, class, family structure locality and life style.

Inclusive education can be defined as the process of increasing the participation of the students in different culture, curricula and communities of local mainstream schools. On the other hand, Exclusive education is the process of reducing the participation. In inclusive education the concept of participation, culture, curriculum, community and locality require careful analysis. In other words, in the inclusive setting, instruction is devised to reach out to all students normal, endowed and ignored etc.

The process of inclusion and exclusion are inextricably linked within a simple school / college. The same students may be both encouraged and discouraged from participation. All educational institutions respond to the diversity of their students with a mixture of including and excluding measures in terms of which they admit to the school, how the students are categorised, grouped and disciplined, how students facing difficulties are supported and how curricula and teaching is developed so that such difficulties are reduced. Therefore, the concept of inclusion leads to developing more work for the educational institutions in response to students' diversity. It is noted that one should include the consider-

ation of overall organisation, curriculum, classroom practices, and support for learning and staff development for better inclusive education. There is a considerable evidence in the western world suggested that the measures which the schools take to cater to the students' diversity can lead to effective form of education for all the pupils. In this respect, a critical analysis of diversified students entering into our higher education system, their specific needs in terms of infrastructure facilities, curricular adoptions or modifications, teaching learning supportive practices, examination and evaluation system for these students clearly gives where we stand and what we need to do for better inclusive education practices for the benefit of these diversified students.

## A PRAGMATIC LOOK AT THE INCLUSION/ EXCLUSION CONCEPTS FOR SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA:

In any school or college or university, one can find students with diversities in terms of their physical and mental abilities or disabilities, students with specific learning difficulties, challenging behaviour or behaviour disorders, students with slow learning, cultural and socially deviant, etc. Of course, the major chunk of the class consists of normal students and the institutions have structured their facilities keeping in mind these normal students. The extreme ends are excluded from the system in the sense that the organizational facilities (physical facilities), curricula, teaching learning methodologies, examination and evaluation systems are not supportive to these students. As a result, even though principally these students are admitted in our higher education system, in practice, they are the excluded group, in other sense; principally they are included and practically excluded. For example:

- Students with motor disabilities are admitted in higher education required certain facilities like wheel chair, prosthetic and orthotic devices. To use such devices, rooms need to be physically accessible and seating arrangement in close proximity with other students. Fixed seating is not of use to wheel chair users and can be very difficult to those with mobility and back problems Classroom should have bright lighting.
- Students with low vision or partially blind may require special physical facilities depending upon their degree of disability. Some may have blurred vision or cannot judge distances and speed or unable to distinguish between objects that have similar colour or shape and size. Others may see things that are very close but little in the middle or far distance or have a restricted range of vision (Tunnel vision). The vast majority of pupil with visual disabilities may have some useful sight. For such pupil one should keep in mind proper lighting arrangement, seating arrangements, arrangements for magnifying devices for better reading and viewing, large print materials with different colour shape and contrast etc. The lessons can be audio taped and the same can be heard by the visually impaired students according to their time and place.
- Hearing impaired students, seating should be in front benches and the hearing aids should be used to promote their hearing ability. If it is deaf and hard of hearing, one has to go for arrangements for lip reading, sign, language and speech training or total communication approach. As far as possible, one should go for providing arrangements for utilizing the residual hearing by amplifying the sounds through hearing aids. The classroom should be noiseless and free from external disturbances.
- Students with mental disabilities one should structure the learning units into small sub units arranging the materials from simple to complex with different modes that affect all the senses of the student. If the disability is severe, it may not be possible to gear up the organization totally meeting the needs of these students within the regular classroom. For such students there should be a resource room provision with all the supportive services required to compensate their disabilities. It is always advisable to have a specially trained special educator appointed for this purpose at institution level who can take care of the needs of these extreme students.

- e) Gifted students are the students who are branded as mischievous in our school education and higher education system. In fact, in any classroom when the curricula, teaching methods and evaluation system are not challenging to the students it is natural that they will divert their attention in some other side if such students' abilities are properly tapped and guided; they are the real source for the development of institutional building and enhancing teaching learning process. The techniques such as peer tutoring or co-operative learning can be used profitably by exploiting the gifted students. The rare innate abilities of these students can profitably be utilized not only for their development but also for the development of whole class. Gifted students can be involved in the development of indigenous teaching learning materials for the benefit of slow learning and intellectually impaired children. This strategy promotes the inclusion of gifted and facilitates the inclusive process with respect to the students with slow learning and intellectually disabled.
- f) Specific learning difficulties - Some students have difficulty in learning using particular skills and they are said to have specific learning difficulties. They are such as reading, spelling difficulties and arithmetic difficulties. These students lack confidence in use of language which in turn leads to dyslexia (Reddy et al, 2000). The students with specific learning difficulties will have problems with a range of activities that one may not immediately associate with reading and writing in higher education. This includes perceptual problems such as spatial orientation (for e.g. knowing right from left, or working out how a map results to a picture), sequencing and other organizational skills (how to put, a written assignment together logically and to organize time and routines), eye hand co-ordination (legibility of writing). Even if the student is fluent in basic skills, still he/she may have difficulty in other areas, and in stress fill situations (examinations and doing seminars) may become less skilled than usual. Some students, particularly those with head injuries and cerebral palsy may have specific learning difficulties as well as other sensory difficulties. Many of the students with SLD prefer to work with computer, which not only provides legible output but also enables to use spell check facilities (writing and spelling difficulties). Some may find comfortable with tape recorder for taking notes and recording lectures. They need all written materials on tape.

Pupils with learning difficulties are not visually disabled and often get less sympathy than pupils with physical or sensory disabilities. These are the pupils in most of the time unidentified and facing academic, organizational, communication, interpersonal and intrapersonal difficulties at college level. These students are really excluded in practice from our educational system. And for better inclusive education they should be cared.

#### **WAYS AND MEANS TO PROMOTE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS STUDYING AT HIGHER EDUCATION:**

- A survey of existing students with disabilities in each college and university to determine the problems they had and the support they would value, should be made. This gives clear picture about the nature and extent of students with different disabilities, thereby to arrive at an action plan in a phased manner.
- In every educational establishment (school/college/university) there should be Disability Supportive Committee, which takes into consideration of different disabilities in students.
- In every institute provision should be made to procure adequate number of technological and supportive devices needed for different categories of students with disabilities. For this ever university should apply for the financial support from UGC, New Delhi. The University Grants Commission should insist that all Universities should establish Centre for Disability Studies to address the problems and prospects of the disabled population.
- Every institute should take care of the necessary modifications of assessment and examinations keeping in mind the nature of disabilities in students
- The National Institute for Multiple Disabilities should develop Common Code of Practice in terms of admission, curriculum, supportive teaching and training technologies, financial support, examination and evaluation system for students with disabilities studying in all institutions.
- Every institution should have a counsellor with appropriate qualifications and expertise to guide and counsel students with challenging behaviours. Researches have proved that involvement of parents, concerned teachers and peer group should be the part and parcel of guidance and counselling process.
- Researches have also proved that approaches like behavioural modifications; cognitive, metacognitive approaches are more effective in overcoming behaviour disorder and antisocial behaviour in students. It is also highlighted the need for using cognitive strategies for special needs children. Staff should be trained to use strategies. Likewise, cognitive and metacognitive strategies are proved to be effective in overcoming language learning difficulties in students.

A well-developed training / sensitization programme leading to positive attitude building and skill development in teachers to deal with students with disabilities definitely yield positive results and promote better inclusive education to the students with disabilities in our educational institutions from primary to higher education.

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